

Soviet, U.S. children visit via satellite TV

By Carol Olten, Film Critic

At 10:26 yesterday morning, the air inside UCSD's Mandeville Center Recital Hall vibrated with tension. Sweat beads popped on the balding head of professor Michael Cole, surrounded by a blaze of lights and maze of electronic cables and intensely concerned whether his complicated high-tech communications project would work. At his feet sat about 200 children whose eyes were fixed on two large picture-less screens in a corner of the hall.

Everybody was ready to be on television — a very different kind of television. Cole's plan was to have Soviet and American children view and respond, via translators, to screenings of films from both countries on the final day

of the 13th International Film Festival in Moscow. The historic linkup was to last an hour.

But one question was on everyone's mind: Would Moscow come in?

To succeed meant beaming a satellite communications from UCSD into the heart of a Moscow film and video studio where hundreds of Soviet children were assembled. As previously arranged, the USSR also would beam up and down, for a total distance of 89,000 miles including more than 11,000 miles of city-to-city travel.

At 10:27 a.m., an image appeared on one of the large screens. It was Vladimir Pozner, a smiling Soviet journalist who appeared to be speaking and inside the crowded campus hall a gentle voice was heard in excellent English: "Michael, this is Moscow calling San Diego."

"I can hear you just fine," Cole responded.

The tension dissolved into cheering on both sides of the communications hookup, a first for the university campus and a historic event in international information transmission.

The hour's highlights were many — in terms of technological achievement as well as human understanding and cultural sharing.

Americans showed the Soviets clips of actress Shelley Duvall's eclectic "Sleeping Beauty"; Robert Radnitz' touching tale of black sharecroppers, "Sounder," and John

See VIDEO on Page B-2



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Young San Diegans respond to a specially transmitted television program from Russia.

At the same time, Russian youth viewed transmissions from the campus of UCSD.

Video: Soviet, U.S. children close 89,000-mile gap via TV

Continued from B-1

Matthews' animated story about a monkey called "Curious George Goes to the Hospital."

The Soviets responded with an animated "Winnie the Pooh," a morality fable about the dangers of becoming too rich, a comedy about computer-age children, an anatomy teacher and a contemporary story of a zany adolescent rock 'n' roller whose older relatives fail to understand him.

Audiences in both countries were enthusiastic. The San Diego area children, age 5 to early teens, represented a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds. The Soviets appeared on the screen to be greater in numbers, but also of varied backgrounds.

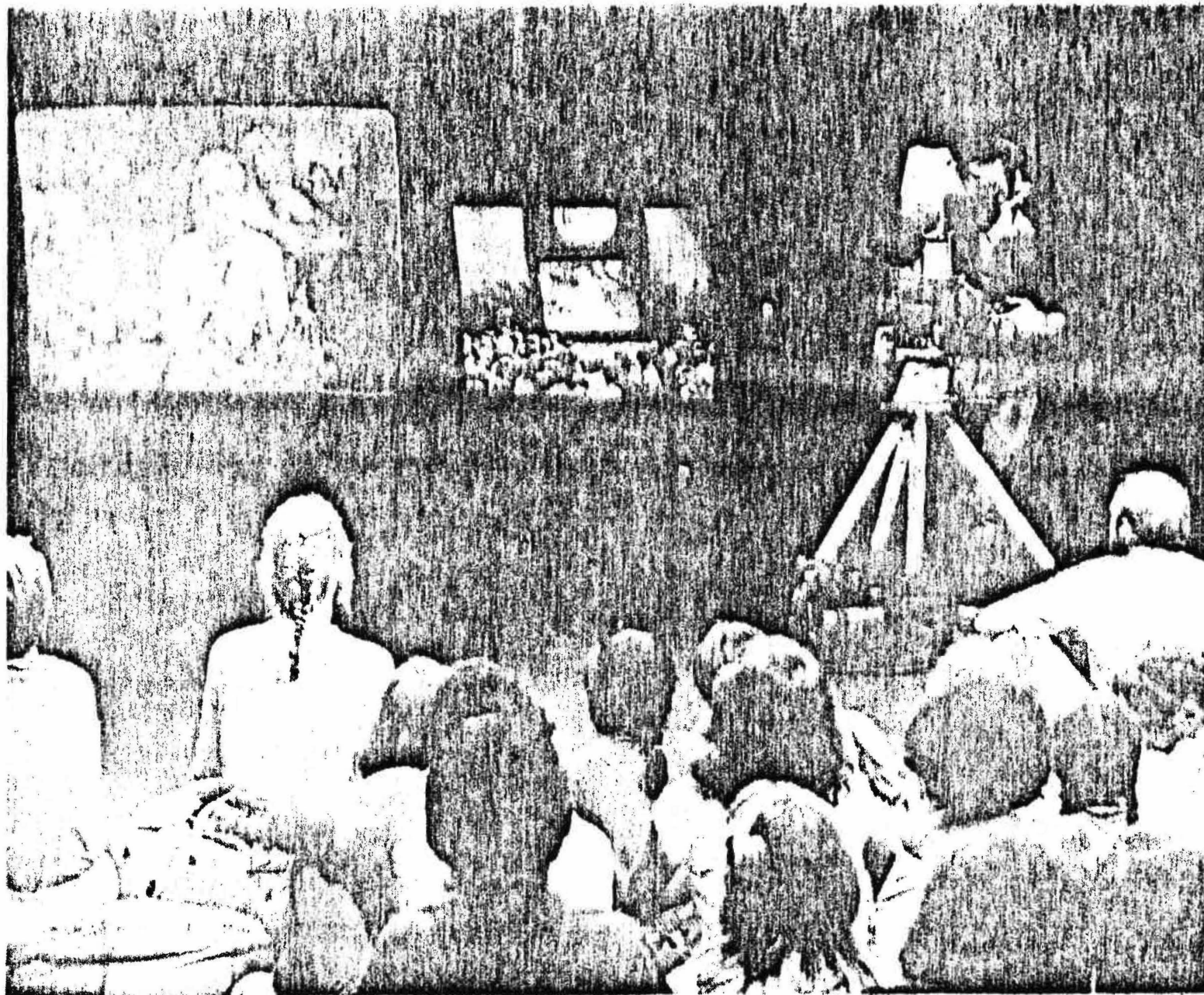
In the satellite question and answer session, a Russian child asked Duvall if she preferred good or evil characters. Seated in a child-like pose on the floor, a bemused Duvall said she preferred to play good people, but liked to dress up as a witch once in a while.

One San Diego boy told the group in Moscow, "I think your films are scary, but I like scary movies."

Another child wanted to know how American children relate to animals. "We also love animals," Cole popped in, beaming by this time over the success of the program.

The simultaneous videocast came about only a month ago when Cole, a UCSD professor of communication and psychology who also serves on the Soviet-American Commission in the Social Sciences, visited the USSR and met Pozner. The two communications proponents discussed how modern technology could be used to add to international human understanding. Shortly, the program began to take shape.

But, said a relaxed Cole after the monitors had been turned off, "We didn't actually know if the thing would work and the bureaucracy involved was tremendous. Up to the moment we were in touch with Moscow, I was very nervous."



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Exchange: San Diego children view a Moscow film festival via satellite yesterday at UCSD, discussing "Sleeping

Beauty" with Soviet students and finding that the Russian bear can be "Winnie the Pooh." — Story Page B-1.